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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Marc Newson

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In the machine age, designers turned to the most advanced technologies of travel as sources of inspiration. Le Corbusier wrote odes to ocean liners and airplanes. Charlotte Perriand fell into raptures over automobiles. Marcel Breuer fashioned his tubular steel chairs after the handlebars of an Adler bicycle. Today, the current of influence may flow both ways: Design might influence transportation technology, too. Or so Australia-born, London-based designer Marc Newson's second solo show at Gagosian seems to suggest. "Transport" presents Newson's designs and prototypes for, primarily, private locomotion: a nickel surfboard with a mirror finish; a nonfunctional, lepidopteran

View of "Marc Newson," 2010. From left: *Kelvin40*, 2004; *Nickel Surfboard*, 2006.

jet with carbon fiber wings and an air intake styled as a gaping red mouth; a candy-colored and crisply contoured concept car for Ford. Transport here is first and foremost an aesthetic experience.

Newson began his career focusing on furniture design, but he derived his forms and construction methods from transportation technology, contracting out fabrication to body shops and high-end aircraft factories or, in the case of a funneled table from 1988, surfboard specialists. But ever since he was hired to outfit the interior of a private jet in 1998, his attention has increasingly turned toward vehicles of transportation themselves. As the Gagosian works reveal, Newson has by now thoroughly integrated his design agenda with the technical advance of new modes of conveyance. Research and development for projects such as a space plane (for Astrium, an aerospace company entering the space tourism sector) or a personal jet pack (for BodyJet), both on view, seem to follow on and support Newson's design imagination. The "jet" on display, a purely sculptural object, pushes this trajectory to its limit. Although subjected to wind-tunnel tests and aerodynamic analysis at Onera, the French aerospace lab, it is, as Paul Virilio remarked in 2004, "no longer a vehicle for anything but its own image." Putting design first also offers a marketing advantage, as the image of a project is used to draw investors, or create a base of potential buyers. Indeed, Gagosian took on something of the quality of a showroom, or even acted as such. Newson's Aquariva luxury speedboat, an update of a classic Italian yacht from the 1960s in Newson's signature materials, such as a molded linen and resin composite, and with streamlined details including a continuous windshield, is available exclusively through the gallery, in an edition of twenty-two.

The art-world context will certainly not hurt sales. Newson's early furniture pieces, included in auctions of contemporary art, fetch record prices. Yet within Newson's oeuvre, it is difficult to distinguish between his one-off, high-art pieces, works for boutique furniture houses, and designs for major brands. His distinctive sensibility of sinuous splines and rounded fillets is applied equally to everything from flatware (for Strelka) to outerwear (G-Star), from an airport lounge (Qantas) to a chaise longue. The whole world, high culture and low, at the most minor to the grandest of scales, is subjected to the artistry of the designer. (The Gagosian show highlights two kinds of scale: the scale of production versus the scale of the individual work—often inversely related. It is sometimes the largest and most complex pieces, such as the space plane, that reach the smallest consumer audience, while the more modest, such as Newson's Zvezdochka slip-on shoe for Nike, might reach the largest.) The appearance of objects of industrial design in the space of art no longer delivers the shock of the ready-made—defined as an object *external* to that realm. Rather, such an encounter reveals that today, in the age of design, nothing escapes the artist's touch. Industrial production is already under the sway of art.

Hannah Arendt, writing on the 1957 launch of *Sputnik*, scrutinized a newscaster's awe at this "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." This desire to break with earthly bounds, she observed, was consistent with a technological fantasy of a "rebellion against human existence," and the construction of a world entirely by human hands. Viewed in this context, Newson's infatuation with transport reveals its true aim: escape into an artificial world, the total aestheticization of experience that is the desire of design.

—*Michael Wang*